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FRENCH ORIGINS OF AMERICAN TRANSCENDENTALISM

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The writer wishes to apologize for the personal character of the following introductory remarks. At the outbreak of the European war, he was struck by the deliberate attitude, on the part of an overwhelming majority of the intellectual Americans, favorable to the English and the French, and unsympathetic to the German cause. He soon came to the conclusion that we had been laboring for years under some misapprehension; that if the letter spelled German philosophy, German science, German thought, the spirit of the nation had not been very deeply affected. Casual remarks which he had made in the past and which had a bearing on the question came back to his mind; and his curiosity once aroused, he found himself confronted day after day, as if by mere chance, with more and more facts,—all pointing to the same conclusion: German action on American thought was not by any means so great as it was represented to be; French action, on the other hand, had been considerably underestimated. He decided to call on the scholarship of his colleagues, wondering whether they would not, after reflection, feel as he did. With this purpose in view he grouped some of the most interesting data he had collected; and at the meeting of the Modern Language Association in Princeton, at Christmas time, he presented a paper: *Notes on an Unexplored Field of Research, the Relation of French and American Thought in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century*.

He had some new information regarding the extent of French reading in the days of the Revolution; he had noted several instances of the serious part played by French educators like Fénelon and Rollin, from the time of Franklin to the time of Emerson; he had tried to visualize with some precision the efforts of Jefferson in the domain of education,—every one of them was inspired by Frenchmen,—and he found them well worth further investigation; he recalled the acknowledged debt of Alexander Hamilton, the Federalist, to Montesquieu. But he must admit that he was especially surprised at the result of his rapid survey of the field with regard to

the German action on American thought in the first half of the nineteenth century; a complete misrepresentation of what had really taken place was evident; just merely possible interpretations of events had become generally accepted as dogmas which no one any longer dreamed of questioning; for instance, even the best and most recent scholars never traced the *German* influence on American thought any further back than *English* writers like Coleridge or Carlyle, or *French* writers like Madame de Staël or Victor Cousin—taking *a priori* for granted the remarkable theory that American thinkers would naturally have borrowed the *German* elements from English and French writers. Or elsewhere vague statements had been converted into positive misstatements; for instance, the so-called Göttingen movement assumed extraordinary proportions; Faust, in his *German Elements in the United States* transforms into "several hundreds," the about 65 students at Göttingen, or the about 125 of which we have a record for all Germany from 1815 to 1850; and the same Faust quietly calls some obscure Emerson studying in Göttingen, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Finally extracts were produced to show that Emerson and Whitman, who were claimed as particularly representing the influence of German thought in America, had explicitly repudiated German thought, while the spirit of their works did by no means betray traces of German philosophy.¹

Professor Lanson, who attended the meeting, spoke of the importance of such investigations and of the spirit in which they ought to be made; but as other papers were to be presented there was no further discussion then and there. Many, however, approached the writer in the days following; they either had already under way some investigation, or they proposed to take up some; others mentioned fields which they knew would be promising. It seemed evident that the paper had simply echoed a wide-spread feeling, and one which was ripe for discussion. Finally, a few weeks later the writer received from Dr. W. Girard, of the University of California, who had heard of the Princeton meeting, a copy of a study just completed and which bears on our problem most decidedly. This thesis, written in French, is so interesting for the history of American philosophy that it deserves to be widely known and discussed. All the more so since some scholars (as happens to be known to the writer) are now exploring the same field and it might avoid duplication of effort.

¹ This article will be published shortly with additions to the original.

Dr. W. Girard, at one time student of theology in French Switzerland, had just the sort of training needed to undertake such an investigation. He approached his task with no passion; there are no snappy words, no brilliant displays of eloquence; often long involved sentences render the reading rather difficult; but the result is a complete smashing of the traditional theory (held even by the most modern scholars like Frothingham, Riley, Goddard, Van Becelaere) of the great influence of German thought in America during the golden age of American philosophy and literature.

The complete title of Dr. Girard's book is, *Du Transcendentalisme Considéré Essentiellement dans sa Définition et ses Origines Françaises* (University of California Press, 1916, 145 pages).

By *Transcendentalism* Girard means the American philosophy which reached its full development about 1840. He calls it "the Puritan form of Romanticism."

Ever since the end of the seventeenth century signs of discontent became manifest against dogmatic fanaticism; and Jonathan Edwards endeavored to give a philosophical basis to the austere calvinistic theology. This made things both better (because dogmas were made to look more reasonable), and worse (because it seemed to strengthen a very gloomy view of life). The English and French deism, combined with the usual natural moralism, and which led to a decidedly less ascetic philosophy of life, found an echo in Samuel Johnson's *Elementa Philosophica* (1752), in Franklin, not to speak of Jefferson and Paine. But now, fear of the consequences involved in an agnostic attitude towards the meaning of life, caused the pendulum to swing back again, to Neo-Edwardism (Th. Clapp, and Timothy Dwight), and to Scotch philosophy (Reid)—one representing the theological, the other the philosophical reaction against Rationalism. The period of the Revolution followed, and when this was over, Calvinism with its dogmas of negation of free will, and of predestination, Scotch philosophy (with D. Stewart), and radical rationalism, were again struggling against each other.

Then it was that Americans felt that they must start anew. They looked for a philosophy which would be more cheerful than Calvinism, more inspiring than a philosophy of mere bourgeois common-sense, and also a doctrine of life which would be directly accessible—no more dependent on abstract rationalistic discussions (possible only for a limited number of leisurely people anyway) than on a Revelation—because it must be of a pragmatic nature. The mere expression of these

requirements spelled the answer: the source of such a doctrine is Romanticism, which, although new representatives of it had appeared since, went back ultimately to Rousseau's Moral Conscience: "Conscience, conscience! divine instinct, immortal and celestial voice. . . . Sure guide of a limited and ignorant being, but intelligent and free . . . !" This was to be shaped so as to fit in with the conditions of thought in America. One sees at once already, that not only has this Transcendentalism nothing to do with German Transcendentalism (except when Pure Reason is replaced by Practical Reason—which Kant borrowed from Rousseau), but the first excludes the second: there is no room in a theory of personal conscience for a theory of knowledge such as Kant's, i.e., getting truth by way of philosophical speculation when it has been already imparted directly and as a whole, a theory leading then to the Metaphysical systems of Kant's followers. Truth will be considered again as imparted to man, immediate and whole, by divine revelation; only the revelation is not through Scriptures or Tradition, but given directly by God to each individual man.

That the whole discussion assumed a pragmatic character—chiefly theological and ethical—and only incidentally epistemological, or even metaphysical,—is clear from the definitions given at various times by American Transcendentalists. "Transcendentalism," writes Margaret Fuller, "was an assertion of the inalienable integrity of man, the immanence of Divinity, in instinct" (*Memoirs*, II, 11); "Man," wrote Channing, "may entirely trust the revelation given in human nature, in conscience, reason, love and will" (*Works*, 928). "The transcendental doctrine is the substantive, indwelling spirit of the soul, the real conscience, the religious nature, the source of the inner light, the veritable true, good, beautiful, not as perception, as contemplation, but as substance, as being" (*Dial*, III, 411). And Frothingham defines it: "Transcendentalism was a movement within the limits of liberal Christianity or Unitarianism as it was called, and had none but a religious aspect;" while Cook, discussing Emerson, says: "Transcendentalism identified morality and religion and made intuition their source" (Quoted by Girard, p. 390). The theory of knowledge, as much as there is any, is borrowed from Neo-Platonism (433-4).

Let it be well understood; Girard entirely believes that circumstances led American thinkers to Transcendentalism; that they needed no one to suggest it; and that, wherever it came

from, foreign influence was in the form of presentation; or when occasionally some new arguments were brought in, these were in support of views already held (394).

First then, that being said, what about Germany's influence? Girard finds, just as the writer had suspected, although after a much less thorough examination, that the Göttingen movement did little more in America, for several decades at any rate, than to start an interest in the German *language*, then practically unknown; but "the influence of those who, before 1830 devoted themselves to that study (of the language) is entirely foreign to the formation of Transcendentalism" (397).¹

There was theology: "New-England," said Girard, "was remarkably well informed about theological controversies in Berlin and Jena, Göttingen and Tübingen. In 1819 they were complaining of the unfortunate influence of a system which was ruining the doctrine of inspiration" (399-400). And in the years following the return to Cambridge of Ticknor, the library of Harvard College received books from Germany, "but these books dealt not with philosophy as some might be inclined to believe, but theology, natural history, and philology" (400). Moreover, "we have excellent reasons to believe that the influence of that theology was not considerable" (401), the chief 'reason' being that towards 1835, when this whole movement came to its full development, the social side had eliminated theological considerations entirely.

As to philosophy in the strict sense of the word, the case is still clearer. Ticknor, on his return from Germany, discusses some theories of Wolf on Homer; Bancroft translates some German poetry; and Henri Hedge publishes his *Prose Writers in Germany*, twenty-five years after his return—no philosophy. And to the direct question: What must we think of the influence of Kant and his followers on Transcendentalism, Girard answers: "Directly, that influence has been zero (*nulle*); indirectly, it came about through the spreading in America, between 1820 and 1840, of the writings of Mme. de Staël and Benjamin Constant on the one hand, and of Coleridge and Carlyle on the other hand." Of this we have convincing evidence. "W. E. Channing informs us that he knows of Kant and of his successors only what he found about them in Mme. de Staël and in Coleridge. Ripley also tells us that

¹ Even that was very slow. In 1833, wrote J. F. Clarke, it would have been difficult to buy any German book in Boston excepting Goethe and Schiller; as late as 1843 I rummaged Philadelphia bookstores for German books. (Quoted by Girard, 398.)

he has read nothing by Kant and that he owes all he knows about them to English writers. Margaret Fuller admits that she understands nothing of Fichte, although she studies him in a treatise destined to simplify his doctrine. As to Orestes A. Brownson, he surprises us very much when, after comparing Pierre Leroux with German metaphysicians, he concludes: "*One could not rank very high such men as Fichte, Schelling and Hegel*" (403). The same man wrote, in 1837, in the *Christian Examiner*, these words which seem to represent the general opinion at the time about German philosophers: "We are not aware that any of them, nor that all of them have as yet given us a philosophy of man."

We come now to the part of English writers in the formation of American Transcendentalism, especially Coleridge and Carlyle. Owing partly to the question of language, this is the chief channel through which German influence could come to many; it thus came indirectly as already said, if it came at all.

Carlyle: Girard seems to us right in wondering why Frothingham, Riley, Goddard, and Van Becelaere always associate the name of Carlyle so intimately with that of Coleridge, as a medium of German thought for America. "Because the English historian was first to make his contemporaries acquainted with a literature and a philosophy which England and America had ignored before, this does not necessarily mean that what he wrote about it was to modify immediately the tendency of a philosophical thought—of a thought which moreover had been modified already in its form through the Ecclectism of a Cousin and a Jouffroy no less than through the religious idealism of Benjamin Constant; and this form it kept during all of the first part of the nineteenth century" (410). Moreover Carlyle is the author of *Sartor Resartus*, and in his *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, he fears not to say: "Kant's philosophy is not only an absurdity, but a wickedness and a horror; . . . his doctrine is a region of boundless baleful gloom, too cunningly broken here and there by splendors of unholy fire." And further: "Schelling's system differs widely from ours; . . . fairer might it be in us to say that we had not appreciated his truth, and therefore could not appreciate his error" (Quoted p. 411).

As to Coleridge the first question would be: Has he been the faithful interpreter of Kant, Fichte and Schelling? Girard does not answer directly on that point; but the following statements are all we need. "If one speaks of the influence of

Coleridge's writings on the religious thought of Calvinists, and even more of the orthodox Unitarians, we are inclined to believe that it was considerable enough; if, on the other hand, one thinks of their influence on those Unitarians who were called Transcendentalists, we are inclined to think that it hardly needs to be taken into account. We have good reasons for thinking so" (407). One of these reasons is that "there is no relation whatsoever between the notion of religion held by Channing, Ripley, and Theodore Parker, and the notion held by Coleridge" (408). In New England the latter was considered obscure and able to offer only little help to thinkers: "We consider him"—says for instance the *Christian Examiner*, which was on the whole very well disposed towards Coleridge—"as in possession of a treasure of valuable truth, and capable of doing a great service in the formation of manly character, on the principles of a sound philosophy. But the obscurity which has been complained of in his thoughts, is certainly to be found in his style; and that to such a degree as to make what he has hitherto written inaccessible to the great majority of readers." Elsewhere: "He has gained little else than smiles of compassion and ominous shaking of heads by his metaphysical speculations" (Quoted p. 408-9).

We now add this—also from the *Christian Examiner*,—which forms an admirable transition to our next topic: "Had it been given to him to interpret German metaphysics to his countrymen, as Mr. Cousin has interpreted them to the French nation, or had it been possible for him to have constructed a system of his own, we should not have regretted his indulgence of a passion which we must now condemn as a source of morbid dissatisfaction with received opinions, unjustified by any serious attempt to introduce others and better." While Ripley, in his *Specimens* (I, 42) remarks: "The objects at which Coleridge aims are in a great measure accomplished by the philosophy of Cousin" (Quoted p. 409).

Thus we are ready to follow Girard's demonstration that the great part in shaping the theories of American Transcendentalism belongs to French philosophers.

That Mme. de Staël's book, *De l'Allemagne*, was a most important source for the knowledge of German metaphysics in America had been recognized—but then not taken into consideration. After looking into the matter, Girard can write: Transcendentalism owed to this book "not only the interpretation of a few fragments scattered here and there from Ger-

man philosophers, but also, and perhaps more, the rousseauistic idealism expressed in many places" (413). And the same idea expressed from a different point of view: "It would not be difficult to show that what is common to Madame de Staël and to Kant came to the latter through the influence of Rousseau's *Emile* and *Profession de Foi du Vicaire Savoyard*" (415). A few pages further, Girard recalls the fact that W. E. Channing, the same who was to play so prominent a part in the formation of the Transcendentalist Club in 1836, read Rousseau assiduously during his stay in Richmond, in 1798.²

But the chapter on Benjamin Constant is much more striking. Although we knew badly, we did know something about Mme. de Staël; of the influence of Constant, in our days—after the loud claims of the Germans that they had done it all—who was aware? Here there is to learn even for French scholars; for, while in France Constant is first of all the author of a novel *Adolphe*, and a political writer, in America he is first of all the author of *De la Religion*.

Let us here forestall an objection. One might say—and it has been said—that Constant's ideas on religion were ideas he had found in Germany. There are two answers: In the first place it is easy to see that the ideas advocated by Constant, even if he found them in Germany, had been especially powerfully developed in France before, and indeed the Germans themselves knew it well.

Constant praises the Germans for having laid stress upon the two ideas that religious revelation through human conscience is permanent and eternal, and that the dogmatic expression of that inner revelation alone changes; but, of course, both are fundamental ideas in the *Profession de Foi du Vicaire Savoyard*. Then (this is our 2nd point) even suppose these ideas were rather German than French, there still remains the undeniable fact that Americans read them in French books—which after all is the question under discussion. Even though the transcendentalists on this side of the ocean, might have found their theology in German authors, the papers and reviews of the time show conclusively that they did *not* find it there, but in French works. Transcendentalists made use of them to refute the Christian predestinationism of

² An interesting remark is that while usually the action of Mme. de Staël's book is supposed to begin soon after publication, in 1814, Girard can tell that it hardly became known in America before 1820, and the real enthusiasm for the book can be traced to 1829 only (413).

the Edwardists on the one hand, and the rationalism of French and English deists on the other. "The works of B. Constant were received in New England, as soon as they came out, with a favor bordering on enthusiasm, as one will see in reading the numerous articles discussing him in the *Christian Examiner* and in the *Boston Quarterly Review*" (422). E.g. the article, *The Spirit of the Age*, has such sentences as: "Schiller, Goethe, Carlyle are still unfamiliar in America; . . . more exciting are the books of Constant and Jouffroy." Or, "The identity of the religious sentiment is the fundamental idea (in the book *De la Religion*) which one of the most eloquent orators and spiritual writers of the age has developed in the first book of his work" (Quoted p. 423). This was in 1827. In 1838 Ripley was to speak with no less feeling of Constant's importance as a thinker; see vol. 2 (p. 276, 280) of the *Specimens of Foreign Literature*.

It might well be questioned whether Girard rendered his book much clearer by treating separately the theological and the philosophical aspect of Transcendentalism. Mme. de Staël's action was both, religious, when she spoke for herself, and philosophical, when she discussed German philosophers; Constant was not so much a theologian as a philosopher dealing with religious problems; as vice-versa the Transcendentalists never lost sight of religious preoccupations when they wrote along ethical lines. But however that may be, another surprise is in store for us when we reach page 428, under the title *Du Transcendentalisme . . . sous son aspect philosophique*. Just as Girard had revealed to us, after a conscientious reading of the periodicals of the time, the profound action of Constant's book on religious speculations, so also he could record the action of another man to-day practically forgotten in America, the Baron de Gérando, on the American philosophy of the times. "When they did not owe to Mme. de Staël's book their first acquaintance with German philosophy, the Transcendentalists owed them to M. de Gérando's *Histoire Comparée des Systèmes de Philosophie*" (449).

M. de Gérando was introduced to the American public by Dugald Stewart, among others in an article of the *Edinburgh Encyclopedia*. Girard also maintains that besides directing attention to German philosophers in his *Histoire Comparée*, de Gérando contributed much to "the renaissance of studies in Greek philosophy in America before 1830" (see an article in

the *North American Review*, in 1824, vol. 18). Those who know how constantly the American Transcendentalists studied Greek philosophy, will surely understand the importance of this statement by Girard.

In 1824 de Gérando published his own views on philosophy *Du Perfectionnement Moral et de l'Éducation de Soi-même* (450) and a translation of it was published in Boston 1830 (by Elizabeth Peabody). The gist of that philosophy is indeed very transcendentalistic: "It is devoted entirely to prove that man's life is a great and continuous education which aims at all his faculties and takes in all his relations, . . . and that one must endeavor to cultivate any ideas capable of inspiring an intelligent and sincere love of virtue." "We have no ethical work of any living writer," wrote Channing in the *Christian Examiner*, "to be compared with that of Degerando" (*sic.*). And when the translation in English came out, the same *Christian Examiner* again stated: "It holds a station in moral philosophy which has not been filled by any writer in our language, either among the living or the dead" (Quoted p. 453). Girard thus concludes that the idealists of New England owed to de Gérando, besides the interest that they showed for Neo-Platonism, the definite form by which they expressed their ideas about religion, ethics, and the destiny of man (455).

Here again someone may be tempted to maintain that, having lived in Germany, de Gérando was influenced by this milieu. What about it, if de Gérando felt attracted and expressed himself sympathetically regarding such ideas in Germany that had come from, or, at any rate, were in keeping with French and English 18th century philosophy?

If Constant and de Gérando were practically forgotten by later generations, as fosterers of Transcendentalism, Victor Cousin was not. But indeed there is a long way from the part he is supposed to have played according to Riley and others, and the part played in reality. Girard throws a flood of light on this question. Of all foreign philosophers who may claim action in America in the first half of the nineteenth century, he appears now to be without doubt the most important;—not only as regards his own personal philosophy, but as a channel for whatever German philosophy finally made its way into the minds of Transcendentalists. Students were aware of this latter point, more or less; but they never took the trouble to find out what was Cousin and what was German in the theories under discussion. Things were made to look very

simple, namely: German Transcendentalism was like a father to a child to American Transcendentalism [which has never been proved]; Cousin, in his works, which were read in America, dealt with German philosophy [which is true at times]; therefore German philosophy came to America through the medium of Cousin [which is entirely misleading]. It took Girard to say at last: but Cousin was an eclectic; if he took ideas from Germans—as he did from all quarters—he transformed them in throwing them into his melting pot of Eclecticism; thus whatever German thought there was in Cousin—and whatever American students at the end of the nineteenth century choose to call them—they were no longer German Transcendentalism.

If moreover one passes to the further question: what elements did Cousin take from German Transcendentalism for his Eclecticism?—the answer is this: "The French philosopher keeps hardly anything from Kant except his notion of free-will. . . . While the center of personality for Descartes was in thought, for Kant and Cousin it was in moral obligation. Take free-will from man, he will live like a plant. . . . He "can" because he "must," and he "must" because he "can" (466). This means ultimately much more than at first appears; for we know very well that, at the end of the eighteenth century, Rousseau had before Kant, spread those notions of "Practical reason," of conscience, of free-will. Thus what Cousin brings over from German philosophy to America, is after all, as has been said, French philosophy.

Another remark: If one does not measure things by the space allowed to the discussion of German philosophy, but by the conclusion reached, Cousin has not even changed his position after the contact with Kant and his followers; he may use perhaps other terms now more in fashion, but his attitude towards the moral significance of life was the same which he had proposed in common with the Scotch philosophers in earlier years, i.e., based on the existence of a direct moral sense: the supreme end of man, he connects with "a faculty of the mind different from all others and the function of which is to give us the idea of the good, as the function of reflexion is to give us the ideas of reflexion, and that of the exterior senses to give us sensations" (p. 462-3).

Besides the domain of ethics, there is that of natural philosophy; there one could maintain that a closer relation exists, namely between Cousin and Schelling. But, adds Girard, this part of the philosophical problem "has no connection with Transcendentalism" (407); and we might add,—

for those who think they can consider Cousin as a mere satellite of Kant and Schelling—that, if Cousin thought much of Schelling's philosophy, Schelling thought as much of Cousin's philosophy. See the Preface Schelling wrote for Bekker's work on Cousin (p. 468, note).

Now, before closing this chapter, let us borrow some of Girard's proofs that Cousin, and not German Transcendentalism, was the godfather of American philosophy before 1840! Not in the sense that he actually proposed, to his admirers on this side of the ocean, a system of which they had never thought before, but rather—as already pointed out—that they found in him a clear expression of what they were looking for, and of what they had a vague anticipation. More than that; "The ideas and arguments which will strike them when they read Cousin will not differ so much from those which they had already appreciated in Mme. de Staël and B. Constant, or in de Gérando, or other forerunners of French Eclecticism yet. Only they will find them, in the indisputable master of this new philosophy, firmer, better defined, more scientifically worded, and they will rejoice that such a scholar and such a philosopher as the famous Parisian professor should have devoted the best of his intelligence and of his eloquence, to defend religion in the very name of science, and to have rehabilitated human nature in the name of religion" (470-1). Ripley will say in his Introduction to the *Specimens*: "Cousin's Eclecticism exhibits to the speculative inquirer in the rigorous form of science, the reality of our instinctive faith in God, in virtue, in the human soul, in the beauty of holiness, and in the immortality of man. . . . It establishes on a rock the truth of the everlasting sentiment of the human heart" (Quoted p. 479).

Owing to the popularity enjoyed at the time by the *Edinburg Review*, Girard thinks that the article published there by Sir William Hamilton, in 1829, on French Eclecticism, must have called first the attention of American scholars to Cousin.

In July of the same year, Alexander H. Everett, just called to the editorship of the *North American Review*, published the Preface of Cousin to the *Fragments Philosophiques*.

And during the same year still, the same review published an account of the principal works already printed by Cousin (*Translation of Plato, Cours de Philosophie*, 2 vol. of *Fragments philosophiques*).³

More important than these accounts, of course, was, in 1832, the publication of a translation (made by Kinberg) of Cousin's

³ Cousin's Translation of Plato contributed largely, after de Gérando, to encourage the study of Greek philosophy in New England.

Introduction to the History of Philosophy,—with a long review again in the *North American Review*.

In 1834, another translation of the same work (this time by C. S. Henry) was published, under the new title of *Elements of Psychology*, with an Introduction, notes, and additions. In eight years, it had three editions. And from that book was made, Girard tells us, a textbook for colleges, which was still in use in 1861 (473).

Then, in 1836-37, Orestes A. Brownson, the most speculative mind among the Americans of that generation, came around to Cousin. He had started as a disciple of Locke, whom he left for Reid and Stewart; a period of scepticism had followed which was a sort of reaction against the sentimental and romantic feelings which had filled his soul after reading Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Constant, and Chateaubriand. In 1833 he founded the *Boston Quarterly Review*; both in this and in the *Christian Examiner* he published articles on Cousin (473). In 1836 in his little book, *New Views of Christianity, Society and the Church* he acknowledges his debt to Cousin—and to France: "She (France) exerts and must continue to exert a powerful influence on all southern and western Europe, and on our own country in particular. She is, as it were, the missionary nation of the world, and it is not a matter of indifference to other nations whether she preaches the true gospel or another. Her doctrines have immense weight in England; they reign supreme in this country; Germany reaches us only through France" (Quoted p. 474). As a counterpart of this quotation, let us reproduce this one of Cousin—who had been elected foreign member of the American Institute, Girard tells us—in his Foreword to the third edition of his *Fragments Philosophiques*: "While my writings on Education (this alludes to his famous *Report on the State of Public Instruction in Prussia* several times reprinted in America) thanks to the fine translation by Mrs. Austin spread in most of the States of the Union, sometimes under the auspices of public authority, the *Fragments*, together with my *Lectures*, founded, without my knowing it, a philosophical school in the country of Jonathan Edwards and of Franklin. But do you know what favors the new philosophy in New York and in Boston? It is, with its moral and religious nature, its method" (Quoted p. 475).

Finally, in 1838, came Ripley's *Specimens of Foreign Standard Literature*—all of which specimens are chosen from the works of Cousin, Jouffroy and Benjamin Constant. With regard to Cousin, the editor remarked: "I may venture to say

that there is no living philosopher who has a greater number of readers in this country, and none whose works have met with a more genuine sympathy, a more cordial recognition. He is destined, in my opinion, to exert an important influence on the development of thought in our youthful land" (Quoted p. 477).

Not very much less important, as regards his influence on American thinkers of that time, was the distinguished author of *Mélanges Philosophiques*, and of the *Cours de Droit Naturel*, Théodore Jouffroy, the disciple of Cousin, and who laid so much stress on the moral aspects of philosophy. Not stopping to mention the flattering references to him in *Blackwood's Magazine*, in 1826, and in the *Edinburg Review*, since 1830, attention ought to be called to an account in the *Christian Examiner* (1830) of the article *Du Scepticisme*, which Jouffroy had contributed to the *Encyclopédie Moderne* (vol. XX); then in 1837 a review, by Brownson of the *Cours de Droit Naturel*; then as a consecration of Jouffroy as a recognized authority, the generous part allotted to him in Ripley's *Specimens of Foreign Standard Literature*. "No article more than *How Dogmas Come to an End*"—says Girard—"was so well made to arouse the interest of the Unitarians who were anxious to do away with dogmatic Calvinism; and in the essay *Philosophy and Common Sense* they found again all the essential features of Scotch philosophy" (487). Finally, in 1839, W. H. Channing published the translation of the *Cours de Droit Naturel*, preceded by an important *Introduction*.

In view of all this, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that American Transcendentalism, if one wishes to look at it from this point of view of foreign influence, was more than anything else an outgrowth of French Eclecticism, even more—since Transcendentalism and Eclecticism are contemporary—than of Scotch Idealism. And the more one looks into the matter, the more the German share grows smaller. Such telling passages as already quoted, "One could not think very highly of men like Fichte, Schelling and Hegel," or: "We are not aware that any of them (German thinkers) have as yet given us a philosophy of man" (Brownson) confirm fully such passages as found by the writer under the pen of Emerson, writing about at the same date: "On the whole what have those German Weimarish friends done? They have rejected all the traditions and conventions, have sought to come thereby one step nearer to absolute truth. But still they are not nearer than others. I do not draw from them great influences. The

heroic, the holy, I lack. They are contemptuous. They fail in sympathy with humanity. The voice of nature they bring me to hear is not divine, but ghastly, and hard, and ironical. They do not illuminate me, they do not edify me . . .” (*Diary*, April 26, 1837). Or Walt Whitman, some years later: “While the contributions which German Kant and Fichte and Schelling and Hegel have bequeathed to humanity . . . are indispensable to erudition of America’s future, I should say that in all of them, and the best of them when compared with the lightning flashes and flights of the old prophets and exaltés, the spiritual poets and poetry of all lands there seems to be, nay certainly is lacking something—something cold, a failure to satisfy the deepest emotions of the soul—a want of living glow, fondness, warmth . . .” (*Late Thoughts and Jottings*, IV, 322).

As a matter of fact, American Transcendentalists never could understand German philosophy; how then could it inspire them? In 1827 the *Christian Examiner* tells us that “Schiller, Goethe, Carlyle, are still unfamiliar in America” how much more must it have been the case with philosophers! In 1830, in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, which Girard assures us was read as much then in New York and Boston as in London and Edinburg, we read about a translation of Kant: “Either it is nonsense in a degree possible only to utter and determined ignorance of the German language; or it is so close a translation of the *ipsissima verba* of Kant, as to offer no assistance to an uninitiated student, to say nothing of the barbarous effect produced by a German structure of sentence and terminology altogether new” (Quoted p. 440). Again, a contributor to the *Christian Examiner*, in 1833, speaking of Kant, too, writes: “We believe it impossible to understand fully the design of Kant and his followers without being endowed to a certain extent with the same powers of abstraction and synthetical generalization which the German philosophers possess in so eminent a degree. . . . The work of the transcendental philosophers may be translated word for word, but it still will be impossible to get a clear idea of their philosophy, unless we raise ourselves at once to a transcendental point of view” (Quoted p. 441). Here is the *Quarterly Christian Spectator*: “We have been repeatedly told that it is impossible to translate German philosophy into English. If it is so we ought not to complain of the failure of any attempt to teach us its mysteries.” Here is Brownson once more: “There is no overwhelming fondness for German literature and philosophy. The genius of our country is for Eclecticism.”

And here is Ripley: "The first condition of popularity among us is the clear expression of distinct thought. For this reason the German philosophers, in their native costume, will never become extensively popular in this country. The fruits of their inquiries will some day pass into general circulation among us; but not till they have been defined and clarified by successive operations in different minds. . . . We must start with the freer, more popular, more concrete and more finished product of the great French writers who have been formed in the German school." . . .

All the above refers of course to German Transcendentalism in America *before 1840*. How things would look if one examined Hegelianism in America after 1850, or even 1860, with the same care as Girard has done for German philosophy in the first half of the century, the writer could not now presume to say positively; but, from what he has read he would not be altogether surprised if the state of affairs proved to be not very different; namely that German philosophy, even then, even after Dr. Harris's so-called St. Louis School, was hardly known from first-hand knowledge. Possibly, one would find that the Englishman Green was the Cousin of that new half century as regards acquaintance with German Transcendentalism.

P.-S.—Since this article was written, Girard's position has been rather severely attacked by G. Sherburn, of the University of Chicago, in *Modern Philology*, Sept. 1917 (p. 125-128). In the writer's opinion, Mr. Sherburn's retort is very unconvincing. He picks flaws, but he does not in the least shake the argument; indeed he strengthens it if that is all one can oppose to Girard. With regard to the French influence, he is forced to agree that the contribution is important. With regard to Girard's "anti-German" position, he fails to make one strong point. He certainly gives no proof that American philosophers of the time knew German philosophy. And nobody who has read Girard can deny that the burden of proof rests now with Mr. Sherburn. The historians of philosophy and of literature, *later*, said repeatedly that there was close connection between American and German thought in the first part of the nineteenth century; not the contemporaries. And the assertion of historians has not the slightest value if it is not born out by the testimony of the contemporaries—which testimony is lacking, and this is precisely the interesting revelation of Girard. The weakness of Mr. Sherburn's own argumentation is well illustrated by the following sentence of his criticism: "With regard to Miss Fuller the fact that she said she could not understand Fichte is far from proving that she was uninfluenced by him" (126). Well, no! Let us suppose that it is *very* "far" from proving it;—at the same time, if the influence of Germany has to rest on such strong constructive arguments, Girard's thesis is not very seriously threatened yet!